

Project Selection Process for 2001 Ecosystem Restoration Proposals

Draft – 6/20/00

The project selection process will identify potential ecosystem restoration projects that meet the priorities outlined in the CALFED Ecosystem Restoration Program (ERP) 2001 Implementation Plan in the Proposal Solicitation Package (PSP), and to provide technical review of projects that may be funded through the Central Valley Project Improvement Act (CVPIA). The ERP Interim Science Board (ISB) and Agency/Stakeholder Ecosystem Team (ASET) have helped develop this process. Project review and selection consists of five steps:

- (1) a threshold review to determine if the proposal meets minimum requirements;
- (2) a. scientific and technical reviews to provide three or more independent assessments of the quality of each proposal;

b. scientific and technical review (Topic Area Review Panels) to consolidate and summarize the independent assessments;
- (3) CALFED and CVPIA staff review to assess specific non-technical criteria for each proposal and to provide a staff assessment of the benefit of the project to the respective programs;
- (4) geographic reviews to consider information compiled from the previous review steps and that assesses the importance of the proposal's objective on a regional basis; and
- (5) an overall review by a Selection Panel, which considers information compiled from each previous review step and assesses the importance of the proposal's objective on a system-wide basis, and works with CVPIA staff to develop joint initial CALFED and CVPIA funding recommendations.

For each of these steps, participants in the process will be expected to base their assessments and recommendations on the criteria specified in the PSP, and not on their personal, associated agency or other entities' policies. Participants will be required to comply with appropriate conflict of interest rules as outlined in the Attachment F of the PSP. Additional conflict of interest information is attached (Attachment 1).

All review information will become public after the Selection Panel has developed a preliminary recommendation. This recommendation will be described in a public forum and the public will be provided 30 days in which to comment. The Selection Panel will

then consider public input on technical matters and finalize its recommendation which will be provided to the Ecosystem Roundtable for consideration.

Each of the steps in the process is described below:

1.) Threshold Review (completed May 19th, 2000)

Threshold requirements as described in the PSP include:

- Standard cover sheet completed, attached to front of proposal and signed
- Copy of local notification letter(s) or letter requesting notification exemption included with the proposal
- Environmental Compliance and Land Use Checklists completed
- Required contract forms signed and submitted

Immediately after they were submitted, proposals underwent an administrative threshold review to determine if they were complete and responsive to the solicitation. Proposals that were deemed non-responsive were informed that they could submit their proposals to CVPIA to be considered concurrently with responsive proposals for CVPIA funding only. Proposals that met the threshold requirements and those resubmitted for CVPIA funding are posted on the web (<http://calfed.ca.gov> under Ecosystem Restoration).

2a.) Scientific and Technical Review (mid June – mid July)

A large pool of scientists and technical experts has been identified to provide individual technical review of each of the proposals. Each of these experts will have sufficient expertise to assess the scientific and/or technical qualities of the proposal, but will not need to be familiar with the Bay-Delta system. From this pool, a Topic Area Coordinator (TAC) has been identified for each topic area to assign reviewers for each proposal based on proposal content and reviewer expertise. It is anticipated that each proposal will be evaluated independently by a minimum of 3 technical experts. This review will be anonymous. Names of individual reviewers will not be linked to individual proposals. Non-agency experts will be paid for this activity. UC Davis has been contracted to administer this process.

Proposals will be evaluated on their individual merit based on scientific and technical evaluation criteria as described in the PSP. The focus of the scientific review is to assess if the objective and hypothesis are clearly stated, if the proposed approach is likely to accomplish the objective, and if the monitoring identified in the proposal is adequate to test the hypotheses and assess the success of the project in meeting its objective.

Scientific and Technical Review will evaluate the following, as described in the PSP:

- Scientific merit (strengths and weaknesses)
 - Clearly stated objectives and hypotheses
 - Sound approach (conceptual framework, design, methods, analyses)
 - Adaptive management context
- Adequacy of monitoring, information assessment, and reporting plans
- Technical feasibility

• Qualifications

Reviewer guidelines in electronic format have been developed to assist reviewers with this step. Each reviewer will provide his/her input on this form providing an overall evaluation and ranking (excellent to poor) of each proposal. Reviews developed during this step will be the most detailed reviews of the quality of each proposal during the process. These reviews will be forwarded to all of the participants in subsequent steps in the process, and will be made public after an initial Selection Panel recommendation is developed.

2b.) Topic Area Review Panels (TARPs) (mid July – mid August)

Topic Area Review Panels (TARPs) consisting of three or more scientific and technical experts and the Topic Area Coordinator are being developed for each topic area to summarize the initial scientific and technical reviews. Each of these teams will have sufficient expertise to assess the scientific and technical qualities of each proposal and the individual reviews of proposals in their topic area. Reviewer guidelines have been developed to assist reviewers with this step.

The review forms developed by the TARPs will summarize the individual reviews and highlight the most important points identified by the initial reviewers. If, in the opinion of the TARP, any of the individual reviews are inadequate, the review teams may send individual proposals out for additional review or, if time is limited, one of the TARP members may provide the additional review. Any review provided by a TARP member will be clearly identified as such. Where initial reviewer assessments disagree, the review teams will identify the disagreement and state their consensus judgement as to which of the initial assessments should be given the most weight in subsequent steps in the process.

The summary assessments developed in this step will provide a ranking of excellent to poor for each proposal, and will be attached to the initial reviewers' assessments. After the identities of reviewers have been removed, the TARP reviews will be forwarded to all of the participants in subsequent steps in the process, and will be made public after an initial Selection Panel recommendation is developed.

3.) Staff Review (mid June – mid August)

Concurrent with the scientific and technical review steps, CALFED and CVPIA staff will review proposals mainly for the purpose of evaluating the proposal's potential benefits to the ERP and CVPIA programs, respectively. As described in the PSP, staff will evaluate:

- Relevance to CALFED ERP goals, ERP 2001 Implementation Plan and CVPIA priorities and plans
- Results and progress on previously-funded CALFED ERP and CVPIA projects
- Local involvement (including environmental compliance)
- Cost sharing
- Cost

The staff review will describe how well the proposal meets the outlined criteria. Reviewer guidelines have been developed to assist staff with this step. Staff assessments developed in this step will be attached to the initial reviewers assessments and TARP summaries for each proposal and will be forwarded to all of the participants in subsequent steps in the process. These reviews will be made public after an initial Selection Panel recommendation is developed.

5.) Geographic Review (late August – mid September)

All proposals and their associated reviews will be forwarded to a set of Geographic Panels. Five or more panels representing the broad geographic areas (a combination of CALFED ecozones and/or CVPIA AFRP ecozones), and landscape level projects (for example, research and education projects that are applicable throughout the Bay-Delta system) will evaluate geographic subsets of proposals and the accompanying reviews. Five to seven regional experts will serve on each panel. Their role is to evaluate the proposals in context of ongoing regional ecosystem restoration activities. The criteria for the Geographic panels include:

- Applicability to ERP Goals, 2001 Implementation Plan and CVPIA priorities and plans
- Relevance to ERP and CVPIA regional priorities
- Linkages/coordination with previously funded projects or other restoration activities in that region
- Feasibility
- Qualifications
- Local Involvement (including environmental compliance)
- Cost
- Cost sharing

The result of the geographic reviews will be a narrative describing how well the proposal meets the outlined criteria, any significant linkages to other projects or proposals in that geographic area, and a recommended ranking and justification indicating the priority the panel assigned to the proposal. Geographic panel assessments developed in this step will be attached to the proposal with all previous reviews, will be forwarded to the Selection Panel and will be made public after an initial Selection Panel recommendation is developed.

6.) Overall Review and Project Selection (late September)

The Selection Panel will consist of ASET, ERP and CVPIA staff and other agency and stakeholder scientists required to evaluate the full range of proposals. Each member of the Selection Panel will be familiar with the Bay-Delta system and all the ERP and CVPIA planning documents, as well as having at least a general knowledge of other restoration planning and implementation efforts ongoing in the Bay-Delta system. The Selection Panel will meet for several days to consider information compiled from the previous steps, to assess the importance of the proposal's objective on a system-wide basis, and to develop a preliminary recommendation of projects to be funded. The

Selection Panel will work cooperatively with CVPIA staff to ensure that CALFED and CVPIA funding recommendations are developed jointly.

The result of the overall review by the Selection Panel will be a preliminary recommended list of projects along with a narrative describing the recommendations. This recommendation will be described in a public forum and all the previous reviews will be made available to the public. The public will then be provided 30 days in which to comment. After this time, the Selection Panel will consider public input on technical matters and finalize its recommendation, which will be forwarded to the Ecosystem Roundtable. The Ecosystem Roundtable's role is to consider the Selection Panel recommendation as well as the input from the public on policy issues.

The ISB has been asked to monitor the process to assess whether it gives appropriate weight to science and adaptive management and will likely contribute to science-based implementation of the ERP. The ISB will not participate directly in project selection, but will meet with the Selection Panel after a preliminary recommendation is developed to provide the Selection Panel with suggestions for the recommended proposals to enhance information value and better incorporate proposals into an adaptive management framework. The ISB will also provide comments on the overall process for next year's cycle.

Final Decision (October)

The final Selection Panel recommendation, Ecosystem Roundtable comments, and ISB comments will be forwarded to the CALFED Policy Group. The CALFED member agencies, acting through the CALFED Policy Group, will make final CALFED funding recommendations to the Secretary for Resources and the Secretary of the Interior, depending on the source of funds. It is anticipated that CALFED funding decisions will be made by the end of October, 2000. For the CVPIA programs considered in this process, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, also members of the CALFED Policy Group, will coordinate their decisions on CVPIA funding with the CALFED ERP funding recommendation.

Attachment 1

Conflict of Interest Guidelines for Scientific and Technical Review (Topic Area Coordinators, Topic Area Review Panelists, Reviewers)

PLEASE NOTE: "Review" in this document refers to assessment by an outside Reviewer, a Topic Area Coordinator, or a Topic Area Review Panelist.

Applicants, co-applicants, subcontractors or individuals who assisted in preparing a proposal may not provide scientific or technical review of that proposal or any proposal in that topic area or combined topic area.

Applicants, co-applicants, subcontractors or individuals who assisted in preparing a proposal may provide scientific or technical review of proposals in topic areas or combined topic areas other than their own. Applicants, co-applicants, subcontractors or individuals assisting in proposal development will be considered as scientific and technical reviewers only when no other qualified reviewers can be identified. The CALFED Restoration Coordinator will be notified if applicants, co-applicants, subcontractors or individuals who assisted in preparing a proposal are selected as reviewers at the time of selection, but will not influence the selection of reviewers.

Individuals having a connection with applicants, co-applicants, or subcontractors, or a connection with the submitting institution may provide scientific or technical review of proposals, but will be required to reveal their connection. A connection to an applicant exists if any of the following relationships were applicable during the **past four years**: collaboration on research, pilot, or implementation proposal or project; co-authorship; thesis or postdoctoral advisorship; supervisor/employee relationship. An institutional connection exists between employees and their employers. For example, an employee of a state or federal agency will have an institutional connection with a proposal submitted by that agency, even if the applicant is in a different division of the agency than the reviewer. Similarly, a university faculty member will have an institutional connection with a proposal submitted from that university, even if the applicant is in a different department of the university.